

PEACEMAKING – GLORIFY GOD.

TEXT: Matt 16:21-28

(from New International Version)

THEME:

Whenever conflict occurs between Christians; does the outcome glorify God or has it satisfied personal needs?

Grace, peace, and mercy, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we glorify God as Christians when we are in conflict with other Christians? By the way, as we heard in today's gospel reading; which tells us that Jesus predicts his death and has no qualms about accomplishing this deed for all of humankind's sake.

Since God the Father loves his creation so much. He wants no one to perish, even those who grumble and

quarrel all the time, that he sent his beloved Son Jesus to do his will among his creation upon the earth.

On this occasion, Peter the impetuous one, who does things on impulse without thinking [uses his tongue first and then his brains kick in later], does his best to discourage Jesus from doing his Father's will. But in reality, he did not understand that Jesus had to and wanted to [freely and willingly], fulfill his Father's will to the enth degree, because that is why he came in the flesh in the first place.

What Jesus is doing and has done, glorifies God to the full measure. No one else but him was found worthy to accomplish this mission. Jesus fulfilled what was required of him to do and glorified God the Father all the while he was on earth. And his work has never stopped; it goes on today, through his workers and disciples of the modern era, through the succession that began with his disciples.

Jesus came so that his people may live in peace and harmony with each other, and to live in peace with God. So the big trick for all of us is to carry out this task in the best way possible.

In the same way [let me ask]; when we squabble and have conflict with each other; does God end up being glorified, because of the differences we need to settle between us? I'd have to say that it certainly can't; because when we are involved in a conflict it will inevitably glorify someone or something else: unless the control we have over ourselves are kept in check at all times [yet I doubt that would happen if the argument gets heated].

As parents, no one likes to see their children quarrelling all the time, God wouldn't be too happy when he sees that happening with his children, would he? In other

words if you do not focus on God it will focus on you or your will or on other people and the threat of their wills.

The big question is: how do I please and honor God in conflict situations? King David wrote: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer [Psalm 19:14]".

So when we show the riches of God's love and that pleasing him is more important than holding onto worldly things and pleasing ourselves, then it becomes increasingly natural to respond to conflict with a lot of grace and dignity. With wise counsel and with self-control. This approach brings glory to God and sets the stage for effective peacemaking.

As we learnt last week, some conflicts will inevitably happen, and that there are four primary causes of conflict. Remember these? Some disputes arise because

of misunderstanding [Josh. 22:10-34]; some from differences in values, goals, gifts, callings, priorities, expectations etc [Acts 15:39; 1 Cor. 12:12-31].

Some disputes arise from competition over limited resources such as time and money [Gen. 13:1-12], that would get the blood boiling at any time. And finally, many conflicts are caused by sinful attitudes [something we may be harboring] and habits that lead to sinful words and actions [James 4:1-2].

Conflicts are not necessarily bad though [as you may be aware], because the Bible teaches that some differences are natural and beneficial. This is because of our individuality of how God has made each and every one of us when he created us [we didn't come out of a mould]. This is why we will often have different opinions, views, convictions, desires, perspectives and priorities on things.

Many of these differences are not right or wrong but are simply the result of our God-given diversity and personal preferences [1 Cor. 12:21-31]. When handled in the right manner, disagreements can stimulate productive dialogue and encourage creativity and change and generally make life more interesting.

So instead of avoiding conflict and demanding that others should always agree with us, we should rejoice in the diversity of God's creation and to learn to accept and work with people who simply see things differently than we do.

Not all conflict is neutral or beneficial, though, is it? How do we deal with the conflicts that cause quarrels and fights among us? The serious extremes of conflict can and does lead to fight or flight which result in death; either by suicide or murder. Those results don't honour or glorify God in any way what so ever!

However, conflict can always provide an opportunity to glorify God. The best way to glorify God is to bring attention to his grace. Let's just deliberate on God's GRACE: what does it actually mean? It is: God's undeserved love, mercy, forgiveness, strength and wisdom, given to us through Jesus his Son.

The next question is: what do you do with this grace?

In the first instance we can trust in God and not in our own abilities to respond to people who oppose us, even though we find it hard to do so [Prov. 3:5-7]. We should also be holding on tight to the promises found in the Bible. We should also trust and believe that when we pray for forgiveness; that our sins are well and truly forgiven, and that we confess them freely.

We should also believe that there is a lesson in the pressure of a conflict, which will help us grow and learn from it. Then depend and rely on God's assurance that he

is always watching over you, so that you stop fearing what others might do to you. Show God's holiness in your life by displaying it in the way that you can forgive someone who has hurt you deeply, through his strength in you.

Secondly, you can obey God, and do what God commands without compromise, this honours him by showing that his ways are absolutely good, wise and dependable [Matt. 5:16; John 17:4; Phil.1:9-10]. As Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you show much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" [John 15:8].

Our obedience also demonstrates that he is worthy of our deepest love and devotion. Jesus also goes on to say, "If you love me, you will obey what I command. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me [John 14:15, 21]." If you want to honour, love

and show that Jesus is more worthy than anything else in the world, then learn his ways and obey his commands.

Thirdly, you can imitate God. When the believers in Ephesus were struggling in conflict, the apostle Paul gave them this timeless advice: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God [Eph. 5:1-2]”.

As Paul was aware, imitating Christ in the heat of quarrelling is the surest way to restoring peace and unity with those who are in opposition to us [Eph. 4:1-3]. When we mirror Jesus’ humility, mercy, forgiveness and bring correction, we give concrete evidence of the Lord’s power and presence in our lives [Phil.1:9-11].

Fourthly, you can acknowledge God, since he gave you the grace to respond to conflict with the forgiveness of others; where people will take notice and wonder how

you do it! But more importantly though, don’t stay silent about it; because people will think its all your own doing and God will get no credit for what he has done in helping you overcome; to reach a good outcome in conflict situations.

So just in conclusion, the next time you come into a conflict, think about how you portray God in your life. You will be showing those around you what you really think of God by the way you act and conduct yourself. If you truly love him, then ask him to help you to trust, to obey, to imitate and to acknowledge him, especially when it is difficult to do so. This behavior honours God and shows those looking on that he is worthy of your devotion ad praise.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.